



This Mini Clubman manned by Gary Webb and Marc Goldfarb became the unlikely overall winner of the treacherous 2012 Alcan Winter Rally from Seattle to Alaska, beating out Subaru in the final stretch.

Trek to the Top of the World

story by paul eklund
photo by kevin barrows

Once every four years, in the heart of winter, people from all over the globe converge to compete in a test of endurance, skill and determination. And unlike the Winter Olympics, they get to bring their cars. The Alcan 5000's 2012 Winter Rally, held February 23-March 2, started in Seattle and sent competitors all the way north through Canada to the Beaufort Sea, then back south through Yukon Territory and finally west to Anchorage in Alaska.

Alcan uses alternating summer and winter versions every two years, just like the Olympics, and for many it is a bucket-list event—a chance to prepare and pilot their cars 5000 miles across the frozen Arctic in nine days. Teams cross the Arctic Circle, driving up frozen rivers, across frozen lakes, even over a piece of frozen ocean just to get to the most northern town in North America that's accessible by car: Tuktoyaktuk in the Northwest Territories. Most competitors purchase a requisite "Tuk U" T-shirt when they arrive, though it provides minimal protection from exposure in the dark of winter.

This year, 25 teams began the journey. Averaging 500 miles a day (with one brutal 730-mile day), teams made their way across British Columbia, crossing into the Yukon and making their way toward the Northwest Territories, traveling bits of the 1400-mile-long Alaska Highway. Daylight was short, temperatures were low, and the snow was heavy.

At Eagle Plains, 200 miles up the treacherous Dempster Highway, a blizzard closed the road ahead. The rally divided at this point: Seven teams elected to hunker down at the Eagle Plains motel, wait out the negative-28-degree-Fahrenheit night, and attempt the Arctic Circle crossing in the morning (just a tantalizing

15 miles farther north). The Arctic is profoundly unpredictable, however, and one night turned into three as the storm completely covered four semitrucks that were stuck on the closed highway.

Eventually, a trio of patient teams was allowed north and made the entire 350-mile trek to the top of the world. Then they drove 31 hours and 1000 miles to catch up with the rally headed toward Anchorage. The rally included a smattering of Minis, a Volvo, an Audi, a Toyota Yaris, a baker's dozen of Subarus, and several BMWs, including an E36 BMW M3.

Survival may seem like the top priority on a such a journey, but the Alcan is still a race. It includes a mix of TSD sections and performance competitions, like slaloms and ice racing. The Cooper Tire Alcan Subaru Forester of Paul Eklund and co-

driver Dale Kraushaar came on strong in the closing days to extend their lead over Gary Webb and Marc Goldfarb in the Atlantic Driving School MINI Clubman. Even after a birthday round of world-famous "Sour Toes" at Dawson's Downtown Hotel, Eklund swept the next day's regularities and set top time at the ice race circuit.

The Subaru's win seemed certain until the engine sputtered and rattled just 300 miles from the finish in Anchorage. Hoping they could limp through the final day despite severe rod knock, their hopes were dashed when the engine completely let go in Valdez. Webb went on to win his fifth Alcan event. Breathtaking views, threatening weather, endless stories, long, slippery miles, and the camaraderie only found during extreme driving events like the Alcan make this an adventure worth exploring: alcan5000.com.

stage rally news

Travis Pastrana will be tackling the 2012 Global RallyCross Championship in an all-new Dodge Dart. Does 600 horsepower sound sufficient? Hit travispastrana.com.

Rally America's director of competition, Mike Hurst, has also been hired by the SFI Foundation as their new technical manager. He will continue in both roles.

Paved road courses aren't the only place for B-Spec fun. Rally America is welcoming competitors in the Honda Fit, Ford Fiesta, Mazda2 and more.